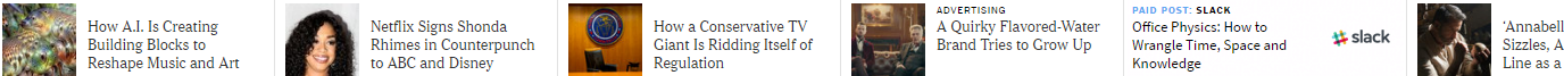


## **EXHIBIT 2**

Document title:	Andrew Rosenthal - Talk to The Times - The New York Times - Reader Questions and Answers - The New York Times
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MEDIA

# Talk to The Times: Editorial Page Editor Andrew Rosenthal

APRIL 12, 2009

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Andrew Rosenthal, the editorial page editor of The New York Times, answered questions from readers April 13-17, 2009. He previously answered questions in [September 2007](#).

**Most recent answer:** [click here](#).

Mr. Rosenthal is in charge of the paper's opinion pages, both in the newspaper and online. He oversees the editorial board, the letters and Op-Ed departments, as well as the editorial and Op-Ed sections of nytimes.com. The editorial department of the paper is completely separate from the news operations and Mr. Rosenthal answers directly to the publisher, Arthur Sulzberger Jr.

Under Mr. Rosenthal's direction, the 18 members of the editorial board prepare the paper's editorials. The board holds regular meetings to discuss current issues. The editorials are written by individual board members in consultation with their colleagues, and are edited by Mr. Rosenthal and his deputies.

Mr. Rosenthal became editorial page editor on Jan. 8, 2007. He had been deputy editorial page editor since September 2003. Previously he was assistant managing editor for news and foreign editor of The Times. He also served as national editor for six months in 2000, supervising coverage of the presidential elections and the post-election day recount, and as Washington editor. As a Washington correspondent, Mr. Rosenthal covered the Bush administration, the 1988 and 1992 presidential elections and the Persian Gulf War.

Prior to joining The Times in March 1987, Mr. Rosenthal worked at The Associated Press, where he was Moscow bureau chief. Born in New Delhi, India, Mr. Rosenthal graduated from the University of Denver with a B.A. degree in American history in 1978.

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## Some Basics About the Editorial Page

Q Do you have fact checkers, or is the idea that your editorials are not



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## Some Basics About the Editorial Page

**Q.** *Do you have fact checkers, or is the case that your editorials are not intended to be factual? Also, are you related to Abe?*

**Q.** *My first question is: Why aren't the editorials signed by the writers? I've never understood why the editorials are not signed, as this would give the writers credit (or "dis-credit" as some may see it) for their work and further would let your readers know who the writers are.*

*And my second question: Does the board have to agree on each editorial? For example, does more than half of the board have to O.K. the final draft or are you the final decider?*

**A.** I chose these as the first questions I'm answering this week for two reasons. One is that they reflect common areas of curiosity about editorials, their purpose and how they are prepared. Indeed, I didn't really know the answers to these questions until 2003, when I moved from the Times newsroom, where I had spent 16 years, and joined the editorial board as deputy editorial page editor.

The other was just to take the chance to say that yes, I'm related to Abe. He was my father. (That's A.M. Rosenthal, for those of you who don't get the reference. He was a reporter, foreign correspondent, metro editor, managing editor, executive editor and Op-Ed columnist at The Times, for a total of something like 50 years.) He died just about three years ago.

Editorials are, obviously, pieces of opinion journalism. They are not intended to be dispassionate, balanced accountings of a news situation or issue. They present a strong and strongly argued position, and do not necessarily present or even take into account the opposing position.

At least, that's what editorials are on our Editorial Page. Some newspapers have editorials that present the opposing viewpoint — if only to knock it down — or, more infrequently, to present a "debate" about a particular subject without taking a strong stand.

In our editorials, we strive to present a strong editorial position (or "bottom line" in our shorthand). Ideally, that's not just to praise or complain (O.K., it's more frequently to complain), but also to offer a creative solution or prescription. If we don't have a strong bottom line, I think it's often better simply not to comment on whatever the subject may be.

When it comes to facts — verifiable pieces of information — editorials are no different than any other article in The Times. (We could have a daylong discussion of what a "fact" is, of course. To a politician there are only two facts — I'm right and I'm going to win the election. But I think we're talking about the basics, like names, dates, places, scientific and technical data, quotes, the voting records of lawmakers, individual items in government budgets, and so on.)

If something is presented as a fact, it has to be correct. How do we ensure that? The same way the newsroom does, by reporting. In fact, I have often told people that the thing that surprised me the most about the editorial page was just how much reporting went into each editorial.

We rely on the news pages of The Times (and other papers, too) for information. A great deal of what we write about is news driven. Sometimes, we cannot duplicate the newsroom's reporting. (The Editorial Board cannot, to pick one obvious example, go out and duplicate the long, painstaking reporting that led to The Times uncovering President Bush's unlawful electronic eavesdropping program.) So in that case, we simply attribute the information to the news pages of the paper.

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attribute the information to the news pages of the paper.

But far more often, the editorial writers do their own reporting, collect their own information in support of our opinions. I like to say that a Times editorial presents a strong opinion based on reality.

Our writers bear the first and primary responsibility for checking their facts, but they are backed up by the editors who edit their editorials and signed opinion pieces, by our very able staff researcher, and by our dedicated and extremely hard-working team of copy editors.

Editorials are unsigned because they are the product of a group of people, who bring their experience and intellect to bear on a wide range of topics. They are meant to represent an institutional opinion, not a personal opinion. The editorial board is the voice of its board, its editor and the publisher of The Times. (By the way, it is most emphatically NOT the voice of the newsroom, which is run by Executive Editor Bill Keller and is entirely separate from my department.)

Our board meets three times a week, on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, for anywhere from an hour to much longer, depending on what we're discussing. Each member has an area of expertise — a beat — or more likely a main one and two or three subsidiary ones.

In our meetings, I call on each member in turn to talk about what is going on in their areas, what we should be writing about that day and in coming days, and what our editorial position should be. Sometimes there is no debate. Sometimes there is a lot of debate.

We are not striving for unanimity and we do not take votes (except for political candidate endorsements, which is a bit more formal process). But we are looking for positions that make sense to this group of highly qualified, educated and deeply experienced professional journalists. They should be based on the principles for which the board stands and grounded in a solid understanding of the facts.

The editorials are written by the board member who is most expert in the subject, most often the person who suggested the topic. There may be times when a writer does not feel passionately, personally, about the topic of his or her editorial, but that person is still the best choice to write it.

Editorials are edited by Deputy Editor Carla Robbins, or Assistant Editor Robert Semple, or me. Individual board members are free to comment on editorials after they are written, and often do. But the editorials are not submitted to the group in a formal way for approval.

For all of these reasons, the editorials are anonymous. We're not hiding anything, really. If you look on our [Web site](#) you'll find [profiles of our editorial writers](#), including the areas they write about. We also have signed appreciations, editorial notebooks, editorial observers and city, suburban and rural life pieces.

In the end, someone does take personal responsibility for each and every editorial. That would be me. The final decider, as one questioner put it. Feel free to send your criticism (or even praise. I mean why not?) to me.


#### Letters to the Editor

*Q. Sir, it will be illuminating if you are willing to lay out the criteria for choosing Letters to the Editor for print.*

*Q. Two questions: one why do so few letters appear that react to previous Letters to the Editor? Do you resist the kind of dialog among readers that use to so delight readers of the London Times?*

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use to so delight readers of the London Times?

Two, you have by now published literally hundreds of letters on Israeli/Palestinian issues that make essentially the same points, frequently in the same language. Isn't it about time you insisted on some original idea or viewpoint in a letter before publishing it? Is Letters to the Editor more devoted to allowing readers self-expression or to publishing material that makes a serious addition to the news and commentary that appears on your regular columns?

A. Well, Mr. Schiffman, I don't think the two options in your last question are mutually exclusive. The Letters section has always been the place where The Times gives our readers a chance to respond to our news and commentary and we think their letters are a serious addition to that news and commentary.

You're right that we don't generally use the letters section as a place for readers to respond to each other's comments, in part because of the way I just described the purpose of the section. We have a giant megaphone to address our readers. The Letters section has always been a place for them to answer back.

In addition, we try to stay on the news and keep the Letters section as fresh as we can possibly make it. Turning into a place for readers to debate each other would make it harder to move on to new subjects, and there are plenty of new subjects each day.

On the specific subject of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, we try to present as many diverse viewpoints as possible, and I doubt we'll ever satisfy anyone with a strong opinion on this issue. (Just look at how passionately you express your own opinion about the quality of our readers' opinions.)

Mr. Sharma: Letters are chosen each day by our Letters editor, Tom Feyer, who wrote [a description for our readers of that process](#). Basically it goes like this: Every day we get hundreds, if not thousands of letters, through e-mail. (We get them through snail mail too, but mostly we use e-mailed letters).

Tom and his team separate them by topic, screening out those that are simply not fit for printing, or are addressed more appropriately to an individual Op-Ed columnist.

Tom then chooses a set of topics for the next day's paper, trying to reflect both the news of the moment and the subjects about which we've seen the most interest. Often, the two are the same. We have room for only about a dozen letters total, so he has to be selective.

Sometimes a Letter is simply a response from the subject of an article, editorial or Op-Ed column, so we run it alone, without any other letters. Other times we run a package of letters on a particular issue. In that case, Tom strives to publish a set of letters that reflect the nature of the debate over that issue. It does not necessarily reflect the statistical balance of the letters we received. Times letter writers often have similar views.

Each letter is edited, for length, appropriate language and factual content. We then contact the letter writer, to make sure that he or she actually sent the letter, and give him or her a copy of the edited letter. Any letter writer is free to reject our editing or make counter suggestions. In the end, we decide whether to print a particular letter.

The best kind of letter is relatively short (under 150 words), clearly written, strongly opinionated and direct. It doesn't contain personal invective aimed at the writer or subject of an article. And it's well written. I'll be honest: Because of the nature of our readers, letter writers who defend Republican,





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at the writer or subject of an article. And it's well written. I'll be honest.

Because of the nature of our readers, letter writers who defend Republican, conservative or right-wing positions on many topics have a higher shot at being published.

Online comments, of course, are a whole different story. If someone asks, maybe we can discuss those in a later posting.

### Is The Times Tough Enough on Obama?

*Q. I have lived in the U.S.A. for 25 years but presently I live in The Netherlands. To be informed about the global news I read NYTimes.com.*

*My question: In the past the U.S. media endorsed Republican interests but now I notice the support for President Obama and his team driving the U.S.A. into astronomical debts. Regretfully, I find in your paper very few opposing views. Apparently, The New York Times is following the popularity of Obama rather than looking down the road and what TARP has done to taxpayer's indebtedness, home foreclosures and unemployment. Banks are laughing themselves to heaven! They don't need help, the American people do.*

*I had expected a more critical approach by the NYTimes?*

**A.** Mr. Frowein, you don't say in your e-mail whether you're talking about news coverage or what appears on my pages, so I'll address just the opinion section.

Respectfully, I urge you take another look. For starters, I don't see how our editorials or the views of our Op-Ed columnists could have been taken to endorse Republican interests. I'm fairly sure former President Bush and Karl Rove would disagree with you strongly. And while more of our editorials and Op-Ed columns agree now with Mr. Obama's policies, there is still plenty of criticism to be found on our pages.

I'd start with [Paul Krugman's](#) column, which has hardly been a cheerleading section for the Obama administration. Nor have the columns of [Maureen Dowd](#), [David Brooks](#) or [Gail Collins](#). I think all of these writers, like our other columnists, call the shots as they see them.

Our editorials, too, have been both for and against Mr. Obama's policies. We have frequently been critical, in particular, on the handling of TARP and other aspects of his response to the financial crisis.

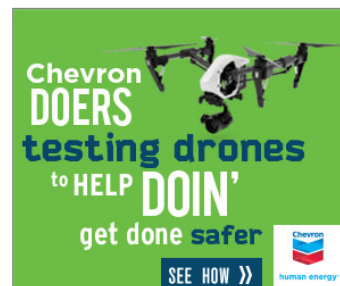
### Women Columnists, Seriously

*Q. I love the editorial page; it is the first thing I turn to in the morning. My question is as much of a comment as a question. I find it a bit peculiar that the two women columnists, [Maureen Dowd](#) and [Gail Collins](#), are satirical and humorous. I adore their writing, and generally think they are spot on, but it is almost like you cannot get a "serious" woman columnist. Do you agree? I also must add that I think the world of [Verlyn Klinkenborg](#). Thanks and keep up the great work.*

**A.** O.K., so I admit. I'm answering this because it's a slow, hanging ball. First, I love Verlyn, too. And second, I would be the last person alive to suggest that Maureen Dowd and Gail Collins are not serious columnists. They are indeed, very serious.

### 'Who Do You Guys Think You Are?'

*Q. I am a fairly well-informed reader who subscribes daily to both The New York Times and Long Island Newsday — and I often read NYTimes.com online during the day to see current news and check up on the stock market. I'm not saying this as a conceited person but often I see*



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*NYTimes.com online during the day to see current news and check up on the stock market. I'm not saying this as a conceited person but often I see through news stories long before you fellows realize what is going on; for example, Hilary Clinton's money problems long before she decided to pull out of the presidential race and that her negotiations with Obama to withdraw were all about money and that NATO should be expanded to include all Russian satellite countries during the recent Russian invasion. I often send e-mails to editors@nytimes.com with suggestions for your editorials. Rather than receiving an e-mail stating that you received my e-mail and my suggestions are being considered, I receive a reply which says you are too busy to read it or respond. Who do you guys think you are? Even if you are not planning to read your reader's suggestions, at least be polite!*

**A.** I'm sorry to say, Mr. Ackenberg, that I just don't have any idea who gets e-mail sent to editors@nytimes.com. — *An update:* Our systems people say that is not a working address. Mail sent to it should bounce back to the sender with a notice saying that it is undeliverable.

The e-mail address for the editorial board is editorial@nytimes.com. You'll get an automated reply from that address too, but you'll see it is quite different.

### Legalization of Marijuana

**Q.** *Why is The New York Times so antagonistic to cannabis? Isn't it obvious that alcohol is far more dangerous to what really matters, like life, limb and fetus? Isn't the war obviously unwinnable and spewing out all kinds of nasty collateral damage? Doesn't it trample on the promise of "liberty and justice for all"? Where's the justice in users of killer alcohol so thoroughly lording it over users of cannabis?*

**Q.** *Would The New York Times be interested in doing an ongoing editorial to discuss the pros/cons of medicinal marijuana, the effectiveness of the program in the 14 states who have already enacted such legislation, the likelihood of success of a medicinal marijuana bill in Illinois, legalization bills in California and Massachusetts and a cost/benefit analysis of federal legalization? In my opinion, it will happen and it is better to happen sooner than later. The enormous amount of tax revenue is a great thing, but the broader issue is whether marijuana is such a harmful substance (studies show it is in fact less harmful, depending on quantity, quality and method of intake, i.e. vaporizer than tobacco and alcohol, not addictive and has no deaths attributed to it), that the government even has a right to continue an ineffective drug war that costs millions of taxpayer money on arrest and incarceration.*

*Corollary issues are the cost of imprisonment, whether the reefer being legal would even lead to increased use and the reason it was made illegal in the first place. I raise these issues because they deserve far more discussion than they have been given, even in light of the other more pressing issues. With more than 30 million people using marijuana, I am confident this issue deserves far more attention than it has got.*

**A.** The Times editorial page has long taken the position that the use of marijuana for medical purposes should be legal, and that it should be left up to the states to handle this issue.

We strongly opposed the Bush administration's policy of launching federal prosecutions of medical marijuana, even when those who dispensed it were obeying their own state's laws and were not trafficking to or from other states. We applauded the Obama administration's sensible decision to back away from that approach.

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away from that approach.

As long as marijuana remains illegal for non-medical uses, those who grow, sell or use it face arrest. But The Times editorial page has been an advocate for decades of fair and reasonable drug sentencing guidelines.

Here are links to a few editorials on these issues:

["Relief for Patients,"](#) March 26, 2009

["Racial Inequity and Drug Arrests,"](#) May 10, 2008

["Marijuana and College Aid,"](#) Nov. 2, 2007

["Prescription for Pain,"](#) June 16, 2007

["The Politics of Pot,"](#) April 22, 2006

["Preserving the Power of Congress,"](#) Nov. 29, 2004

["Federal Persecution,"](#) May 31, 2003

["Misguided Marijuana War,"](#) Feb. 4, 2003

["A Win for Medical Marijuana,"](#) Oct. 31, 2002

["Setback on Medical Marijuana,"](#) May 17, 2001

## The Right to Bear Arms

*Q. Has The New York Times decided as a company policy to oppose the right of the people to keep and bear arms without infringement as stated in the Second Amendment to the Constitution, or is this opposition a decision that was adopted unilaterally by the editorial staff/board/leadership?*

*Have you decided that the 'Bill of Rights' are not meant by the founders to define certain "rights of the people" endowed by their creator, whomever or whatever that creator might be?*

**A.** As far as I know, The Times has no corporate policy on the Second Amendment. The editorial board's position is really nothing like you describe it.

We believe that the Second Amendment conveys a communal, or societal, right to bear arms in the interest — as the Framers put it — of a “well-regulated militia.” Please note the use here of the word “regulated.”

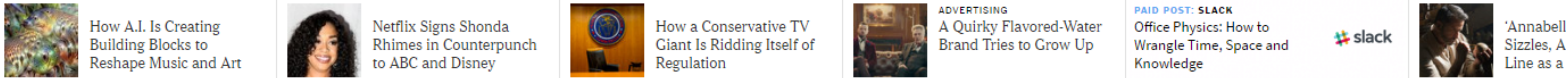
We believe that Americans should be allowed to purchase and own weapons, but that reasonable restrictions on those weapons may be imposed by the federal, state and local governments in the interest of public safety. That, by the way, was the position of the Supreme Court last year in [a ruling that struck down parts of the District of Columbia's gun-control laws](#).

Even though that decision also said the constitution conveys an individual right to own guns (with which we do not agree), it said that governments may impose reasonable restrictions on that ownership.

Here is [our editorial on that decision](#).

We feel strongly that it is well within the rights of cities, states and the federal government to restrict the ownership and storage of handguns, which are huge threats to the lives of city dwellers everywhere. Ask most police departments. They agree.

In urban areas, handguns are used almost solely to shoot other human beings. Those who keep them for collections or target shooting would not be



In urban areas, handguns are used almost solely to shoot other human beings. Those who keep them for collections or target shooting would not be inconvenienced by laws requiring registration of such weapons, or laws that restrict who may buy them, or laws that require them to be stored in homes in safe and secure ways.

There should be laws requiring background checks and waiting periods for purchases of all firearms. This is not remotely an impediment to owning or using rifles and shotguns for legitimate purposes. Hunters have to get licenses to hunt. Why not register the weapon?

People with records of violence or serious mental illness should not be allowed to buy guns.

Children should not be allowed to buy guns.

Gun show operators should not be permitted to circumvent background check requirements for selling guns.

Automatic weapons and assault-type weapons should be regulated.

The police department in New York should be allowed to trace weapons that were used in crimes here — including far too often the murder of police officers — to those who sold them to criminals in other states.

The federal government should not pass laws that protect unscrupulous gun makers and gun dealers from having to answer for the consequences of their actions in selling weapons to those who traffic in them illegally.

We do not take an absolutist position on guns. The absolutist, extreme position is to claim that the complex wording of the Second Amendment, written in the 18th century, means that there can be no restrictions on gun ownership in the 21st century.

#### Who Writes the Headlines on Op-Ed Columns?

**Q.** *I was wondering if the Times' Op-Ed columnists write their own headlines.*

**A.** Yes, they do.

#### Bailout for Newspapers?

**Q.** *Is there any truth to the rumor I heard that the United States government was going to offer a "bailout" to the print media industry, so long as the papers taking the bailout limited or eliminated their opinion page? Just curious — thanks!*

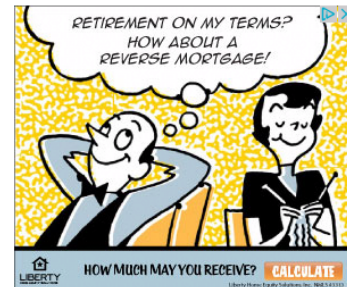
**A.** I've never heard the rumor.

There's been talk about the newspaper industry, of course, as the recession has deepened and newspapers have closed around the country. And some people have suggested that newspapers seek an exception to federal antitrust rules so they can start charging for their Web sites as a group, instead of one by one.

But it's hard to imagine how Congress could pass any law giving money to the nation's newspapers, since that would clearly violate the First Amendment, and it's just as hard to imagine a newspaper's taking money directly from the federal government.

As for eliminating opinion pages, now there's a truly bad idea!

Let me just add, seriously, that if government officials think their problems with newspapers are confined to the opinion pages, then they are not paying attention. The real hard work of uncovering government's doings.





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with newspapers are confined to the opinion pages, then they are not paying attention. The real hard work of uncovering government's doings, and wrongdoings, is carried out for the most part by reporters in the nation's newsrooms, not by its editorial and Op-Ed pages.

Opinion pages have an impact on public debate, and they sometimes reveal things the government would rather have kept quiet. (I'm thinking most recently of the publication by the New York Review of Books of the devastating [Red Cross report on the torture and abuse of prisoners in American detention camps.](#))

But the Pentagon Papers, Watergate, the [Iran-Contra](#) mess, C.I.A. assassination plots, illegal wiretapping, and so many other government scandals were brought to Americans' attention on the news pages of American newspapers, not the editorial pages.

### Diversity and the Editorial Board

*Q. How come the New York Times Op-Ed board does not reflect the diversity of this country? There are only two women, no Muslim, no Asian, and no Hispanic among the writers, and only until very recently another black man was added. Also, I might be wrong, but there is no WASP either?*

**A.** The Times Editorial Board is not as diverse as we'd like, or as diverse as it could be, but your census by gender and ethnicity is wrong. You can see for yourself by looking [here](#).

As for religion, it is not my habit to quiz my staff on their religious beliefs.

### Anonymous Reader Comments on Articles

*Q. I was thrilled to see that you will be answering some questions this week, and hope mine is worthy of a response.*

*I am writing you to gain some insight as to why it is that some newspapers still allow anonymous blog posts to immediately follow news stories. Doing so seems to blur the distinction between news and opinion, and the anonymity makes me wonder if, at times, there is one person posing as various individuals in an effort to manipulate public perception. If I recall correctly, The New York Times used to have open blogs, but changed that practice. Can you explain the thinking behind that, and perhaps surmise why other newspapers have chosen not to do so?*

*It seems that for papers which choose to allow such posts, the articles posted may be factual, but many of the anonymous blog posts are hateful rantings from demagogues hiding behind a cloak of anonymity. And although the articles may be well researched and presented with an absence of malice, the same cannot be said for the cowards who engage in submitting a variety of hateful or misleading/false comments. I'd be interested to learn your thoughts on this matter. Thank you.*

**A.** I'm a little confused by some of the terminology as you use it in your question, but I think the gist of it is, What do I think about anonymous comments on news articles on our Web site?

Frankly, not much. Comment is a big part of news Web sites (of most Web sites in fact), although it was hardly invented by the Internet. Letters to the Editor are reader comments. They've existed for a long, long time. Nor is the idea of "community" an invention of the Web age. Newspapers have been fostering and creating communities since the first one came off the first press. Radio and television have each contributed enormously to "community."



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"community."

The big difference between those letters to the editor and most comments is, as you point out, the fact that many, if not the vast majority, of online comments are anonymous. Personally, I find anonymous comments to be pretty uninteresting — and it's not because I'm a Luddite. I've been using computerized message boards since 1986.

It's just a personal preference. When I'm scanning comments (and I scan the comments on every Opinion section article that offers comment), I tend to read the ones with names attached and ignore the ones with screen names. I have a lot of interest in what John Krouskoff of New City has to say, and really none in what spatula187 (to make up one printable screen name) has to say.

Apart from wanting contact with real people, I find that Internet anonymity fosters one of the worst aspects of the Internet culture: creepy rudeness.

At The Times, we moderate all of our public comment spaces. It's time consuming and expensive, and it's not a simple task. But we believe that it is necessary, because we want lively and tough debate. We just don't want to create a cacophonous schoolyard. There's plenty of that online already.

I don't think that allowing readers to comment on news articles blurs the line between news and opinion. It's generally pretty clear in those cases where our reporting and writing ends and where the reader comment begins.

#### Etymology of Op-Ed Page?

*Q. Would you be able to offer some historical background on the origin of The New York Times's Op-Ed page since it was first launched on Sept. 21, 1970? As best I can determine, the name "Op-Ed" (opinion-editorial) was derived from a page in The New York World called "Op-Ed" under the direction of Herbert Bayard Swope, who organized a collection of columns by staff writers. In addition, The Chicago Tribune featured opinion pieces as far back as 1912. The Times, however, at the suggestion of John Oakes, was the first to seek outside writing contributions from persons with expertise in different fields from all walks of life. The first editor of the page was Harrison E. Salisbury.*

**A.** Actually, Op-Ed does not stand for Opinion-Editorial. It stands for Opposite Editorial, which is where it started appearing in The Times on that date, Sept. 21, 1970.

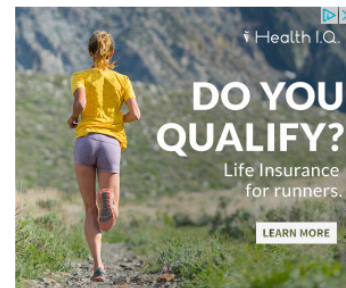
The idea was not just to organize columns by staff writers, which had been done, as you say, by other papers, but to also create a forum for opinion writing by people who do not work for The Times.



Andrew Rosenthal Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Over the years, we have refined what we mean by "opinion writing," to include art and charts and many other things. Online, we have had video Op-Eds. We also have had a lot of success with group blogs, a collection of writers whom we ask to approach a single subject on an ongoing basis.

These subjects have varied widely, as have the kinds of groups we've assembled. We have had soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan and newly returned soldiers; ordinary Iraqis; teachers and students; musicians and composers:





There is, sadly, a rather mean-spirited tone to a lot of the dialog online, which is fostered by the culture of anonymity on the Internet. Many



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There is, surely, a rather mean-spirited tone to a lot of the dialog online, which is fostered by the culture of anonymity on the Internet. Many commenters are not satisfied with expressing an opinion. They have to denigrate the author of the piece on which they are commenting, or one or more of the other commenters, and in a highly personal fashion that always puzzles me, since they surely don't know the people about whom they are talking.

I guess the answer to your third question is implicit here. No, I don't think all comments are of equal value.

### How Columnists Are Chosen

*Q. Against which criteria do you hire Op-Ed columnists?*

*Q. Why are so many of your Op-Ed writers dismissive, arrogant and glib? I suppose my question is one of taste: must an Opinion page's staff be cruel and arrogant to make a point? Does arrogance and rudeness help a writer establish a sense of superiority, which I would guess is needed to claim that his or her opinions are worthy of national consumption? In short, do you ever feel uncomfortable with the condescending tone that is sometimes set by certain of your writers or your group as a whole?*

**A.** I don't think it's fair to characterize The Times's Op-Ed columns as dismissive, arrogant and glib. Many of our columns are sharp and pointed, and criticism when made is generally made strongly and with passion, just as praise is offered strongly and with passion. But I don't agree with the generalization.

Hiring new columnists is one of the toughest tasks an opinion editor has, in my view. It's a lot easier to do online, where there's lots of room and it is much easier for people to come and go. Giving someone a regular spot on the print Op-Ed page is another thing entirely.

Writing a twice-weekly Op-Ed column for The Times, or a longer once-a-week column, is a real high-wire act without a net. Our columnists are expected to have a continuous stream of good, fresh ideas and to present them in interesting, engaging and challenging ways. They also have to write really well (for an example of not writing really well, you can cut and paste this sentence). And they only get about 800 words.

We look for people with broad and deep interests, not necessarily a detailed specialization in one particular area. Long and varied journalistic experience is an obvious plus, since the deadline demands of column writing are pretty intense. A sense of humor is a great thing.

But mostly there is something inchoate that cannot be put on a resume — the ability to think very clearly, the strength to reach conclusions and the courage to lay them out before a huge, discerning and demanding audience in an eloquent and unequivocal way.

Some columnists are intensely ideological, and that's O.K., as long as they are not blindly partisan. Taking sides in politics is part of a columnist's job. But the Times Op-Ed page is not the place for rote cheerleading for either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party.

Columnists are journalists. They have to do a great deal of original reporting, and it is their responsibility to remain intellectually honest.

If a "liberal" or "Democratic" columnist thinks that the Democratic candidate for president is wrong on the issues, or making a hash of his or her campaign, it is his or her duty as a journalist to say so. The same, obviously, goes for a "conservative" or "Republican" columnist.

One particularly maddening example of this came last year, during the





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One particularly maddening example of this came last year, during the campaign, when a large number of “conservative” columnists fell all over themselves praising Sarah Palin in public, and then trashed her in private. I thought the ones who said publicly *and* privately that Sarah Palin was a good choice were profoundly misguided. But the ones who told their audience one thing when they believed another were not doing their jobs.

## How About The Journal?

*Q. What do you think of your counterparts at The Wall Street Journal?*

**A.** The Wall Street Journal has long been an excellent newspaper and a formidable competitor. I'm not entirely crazy about some of the changes that have been made under its new ownership, but it remains one of the top papers in the country. Apart from utterly lacking the skills to be The Times's business editor, one of the reasons I've always been glad I am not in that job is that competing with The Journal would keep me up at night.

I read The Journal's editorials almost every day, along with those in The Washington Post and The Los Angeles Times — for competitive reasons. I'm chagrined when any of those papers beat us to an idea, but it's always a little easier with The Journal, since the chances that we're going to take the same position on a whole range of issues is pretty minute.

When I first started working on the Times editorial page, I ran into Paul Gigot, The Journal's editorial page editor, at some big event and I told him I thought his page was powerful. I said that it is so well written that sometimes I find it convincing, but if I take a deep breath and wait a few minutes, that feeling generally passes.

One of the hallmarks of our Op-Ed page is that there is a lot of diversity of opinion and differences with our editorial positions. As a reader, I don't find as much of that as I'd like in The Journal.

## The Democratic Process

*Q. One unsettling tendency I have noticed in several contexts is for your page to argue for ignoring or circumventing the democratic process if it fails to produce the result it advocates for. Some examples:*

*You do not agree with the referenda that imposed term limits on elected New York City officials so you advocated for the City Council to overturn them.*

*You do not agree with the California Ballot Measure on same-sex marriage so you advocated for the California Supreme Court to overturn it.*

*You do not agree with current U.S. law regarding immigration quotas and for the lack of an avenue for citizenship for undocumented immigrants so you advocate for either no enforcement or lax enforcement. I know you have said in the past that you do advocate for enforcement but honestly, I can't find a recent enforcement measure you have supported. For example, in today's editorial you advocate strongly for enforcing the border against criminals but imply that enforcement agents should leave economic migrants alone.*

*And you generally advocate for the judiciary to use its powers expansively to strike down legislation you feel is wrong (this is old news).*

*My guess is you can quibble with any of these statements but my larger question is, do you feel the people are capable of getting it right? Or is it more of a process of giving them a chance to get it right but if they can't we are justified in asserting a higher power to achieve the correct result?*



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we are justified in asserting a higher power to achieve the correct result?

To me a more respectful approach would be to say, "I disagree but the will of the people is sacrosanct and I need to work harder at persuading them to my point of view." A more difficult approach to be sure, but I would argue more noble. But perhaps in our history of slavery such a high-level of deference is forfeit.

A. I am not going to go through your letter point by point, although you mischaracterize our positions on several points, including immigration. But I will say that it is simply not the case that we argue for circumventing the democratic process when we don't like the results. We are opposed, in general and on principle, to government by ballot referendum — or more accurately, government by sound bite and political consultant.

Of course we feel the people are capable of getting it right and even when they get it wrong, as in the two elections that resulted in George W. Bush being president, we respect that choice and have never argued for overturning it.

That is the whole point.

Americans elect representatives to their local, state and federal governments. They have a chance at each election to remove them or keep them — unless of course that choice has been short-circuited by term-limit laws (which we also oppose, with the exception of the presidency, on the ground that they deprive voters of the right to make a choice on Election Day).

Ballot referenda are notoriously vague, easy to demagogue and tragically read or understood by very few voters.

They have rendered California virtually ungovernable. In the specific case of California's anti-gay-marriage ballot measure (quite apart from my inability to see how it serves your larger point to have huge amounts of cash flowing in from other states to affect California's voters), we think the Supreme Court needs to review whether the change was made constitutionally, not whether it is fair.

Sometimes it takes courageous politicians or judges to show people when they are wrong. Yes, slavery is an excellent example. There are many, many others.

Here are a couple of editorials on California's endless run of referenda that make some of the points I tried to make here:

"That Flurry of Ballot Questions," Nov. 5, 2005

"California's Day After; Overshadowed Blessings," Oct. 9, 2003

### Cutting Back on Columnists?

Q. Are you cutting back on the op-ed columnists' schedules? It seems that one or the other of them is always "off today" of late.

A. No, there is no reduction in columnists' schedules. They take vacations. They get sick. They write books. Sometimes those come in batches. Sometimes they don't.

### Web Metrics and Editorial Decisions

Q. Does the editorial page take into consideration Web ratings and the potential for viral propagation (i.e., hits, page views, links, citations and other sources of Web traffic that direct back to NYTimes.com) when considering whether or not to publish a piece or address a topic?



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other sources of Web traffic that direct back to [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com) when considering whether or not to publish a piece or address a topic?

**A.** No, we do not. We write about what is in the news, or topics that we think are important, interesting, engaging or (yes) amusing, for us and our readers.

### The Wall Between News and Editorial

*Q. Several months back I wrote Mr. Keller complimenting him on his remarks to students on running a newspaper. I forward similar compliments to you on the topic of how to run the editorial side. Is the true arbiter on the issue of separation of church and state Mr. Sulzberger, and does he, in his own mind, make such a distinction? Although a German Canadian conservative, I consider you required reading.*

**A.** Yes, in the end, Arthur Sulzberger Jr. would be the final arbiter of the separation between News and Editorial. (I try to avoid the church/state comparison because I guess that makes us the church and that makes me uncomfortable.)

It is a real distinction, and an important one. Bill Keller, as executive editor, is in charge of The Times's newsroom and the vast majority of the pages we print on paper and online.

As editorial page editor, I am in charge of the editorial and Op-Ed pages and the online Opinion pages. I have my own staff. I don't report to Bill Keller but, rather, directly to the publisher.

The editorial board's thrice-weekly meetings are not open to members of the newsroom staff, nor are our meetings about candidate endorsements. When we have guests, as we do every day, we invite the newsroom to send people to those meetings if the guest is willing to have a news reporter or editor sitting in on the session. Members of the newsroom are not told in advance which candidates we are going to endorse in elections.

This is not to say that there is no communication across this line. I talk to and meet with Bill frequently. We just don't discuss the news coverage or the editorial coverage.

Members of my staff are free to contact reporters to follow up on their reporting or check facts or seek guidance in their own reporting. It would be deeply inappropriate for a member of the editorial board to advocate for some line of news coverage, just as it would be inappropriate for a reporter or editor in the newsroom to lobby us to take a particular editorial position.

Members of the news staff may not write for the editorial or Op-Ed pages. Members of the staff of the editorial department may not write for the news sections, although they may write for sections like the Book Review, which is an opinion section after all, or for feature sections like Travel.

### Deciding When to Shut Off Comments

*Q. First, I would like to thank you for the intelligent editorials and Op-Ed writers. I do not always agree with everything I read, but I do applaud the excellent writing. How do you decide to end the comments? Could you eliminate some, if the comments are long, to include others? In cases where the editorial or Op-Ed is very controversial, it would be worthwhile to read as many comments as one can. Finally, in a reply to a previous writer, women may write with humor to entice readers and keep them reading to a column that is very serious in nature.*

**A.** Thanks very much for the compliments.

On comments, it's basically a question of resources. We moderate



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On comments, it's basically a question of resources. We moderate comments on our site, and we have a finite number of moderators. Essentially, it works like this: The comment moderators come in to work and find a queue of comments that have been sent in. There could be 200 comments in the queue. There could be 2,000.

A judgment is made about how many comments they will be able to get through during their working day. If that is more than are in the queue, it is left open. If that is significantly less, then we shut off new comments and proceed to work through the existing ones. The calculation can change from day to day, depending on how many comments individual articles get and how many articles are open for comment.

### Selection of the Newest Columnist

*Q. Could you explain the process and considerations behind Ross Douthat's selection as an Op-Ed columnist?*

A. We were looking for an interesting, fresh conservative voice for our page. After looking at many columnists, some of whom were terrific, we felt in the end that Ross had the right combination of interests — politics, policy, culture, society. He is also well-versed in the world of Web opinion journalism.

He will be starting soon.

In an earlier post, I talked in more detail about [what I think makes a great Op-Ed columnist](#).

### Can Columnists Write Whatever They Want?

*Q. Are columnists allowed to write whatever they want? Since these kinds of pieces are personal opinions, does The New York Times have a set of basic rules that writers have to comply with?*

A. Columnists are free to write on virtually any subject, and to take whatever position they like. This is not entirely a blank check, however. Columns have to conform to Times standards for factual accuracy, taste and journalistic ethics.

We also ask our columnists not to straightforwardly endorse political candidates, which we think is more properly done on the editorial page.

Columnists are, for the most part, subject to the rules of the New York Times Manual of Style and Usage, although they are allowed some freedom in bending those rules. Our columnists, for example, are permitted to drop honorifics like Mr. and Ms.

### Who Does the Thinking?

*Q. What do The Times's opinion pages do that, say, amateur and professional bloggers can't do? That is, how do you differentiate Times editorials from all the readily available commentary out there? Or are you trying to play catch-up with other online media outlets, since you link to some columnists' blogs on The Times's Web site?*

*Q. I read lots of technically based editorials. I often wonder, "how do these people know this stuff, why do they sound so sure, and who does their thinking for them?"*

*I'm thinking of questions such as these: Fed Policy, Climate Change, whether Scooter Libby received a fair trial, whether Shakespeare's really dead.*

*I was especially interested in a recent article about Professor Dusen in*



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*I was especially interested in a recent article about Professor Dyson in your Sunday magazine. It is clear that he and several scientists in the Heartland Coalition are not kooks. How do your editorial writers decide that they are members of the flat earth society?*

*It also seems that you sometimes take positions on issues that haven't been reported in the news pages, and I wonder about this. Perhaps I've missed the article. Perhaps you could reference the article in your editorial.*

*Who does your research, and how do you make decisions about which position to take on complicated technical questions when there is more than one legitimate position?*

*Notice that I am not challenging your right to produce these epistles. I'd just like to know how the kitchen in your restaurant works.*

**A.** The Times opinion pages are written by professional journalists, with a great depth of experience and knowledge and with proven reporting skills.

They have the entire resources of The Times behind them, as well as the access that being a Times editorial writer provides for them. They talk and meet with leaders of government, business and society daily.

There's a great deal of good commentary out there on the Web, as you say. Frankly, I think it is the task of bloggers to catch up to us, not the other way around.

The answer to the basic question of how we know what we say we know is twofold: Experience and hard work. The members of the editorial board do an extraordinary amount of reporting, every single workday. They read voraciously, and they talk to many people with different kinds of information and varying points of view.

Yes, we sometimes take positions on issues that have not been reported in the news pages. Those editorials are based on our own enterprise reporting.

Our board is staffed with people with a wide and deep range of knowledge on many subjects. Phil Boffey, for example, has decades of science and medical writing under his belt and often writes on those issues for us. Robert Semple, similarly, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer on environmental issues. Our foreign affairs writers, Carol Giacomo and Deputy Editorial Page Editor Carla Robbins, have decades of experience in those areas. Carla was part of a Pulitzer Prize-winning team when she was with The Wall Street Journal.

Here's one way to look at it: If the Times editorial board were a single person, he or she would have six Pulitzer prizes; one Emmy; one Polk Award; one Georgetown Weintal Prize for Diplomatic Reporting; one Horace Greeley Award for Public Service; one Scripps-Howard Walker Stone Award; one Overseas Press Club Award; one Peter Weitz Prize on Reporting on Europe; one United Nations Correspondents' Association Award; two law degrees; and five doctorates, in history, psychology, English literature and political science.

He or she would be a former Guggenheim Fellow, Nieman Fellow, N.E.A. Fellow, Knight-Bagehot Fellow, Thomas J. Watson Fellow, U.S. Institute of Peace Fell, Briggs-Copeland lecturer at Harvard, W.E.B. Debois lecturer at Harvard, New York Times Moscow bureau chief, Associated Press Moscow bureau chief, New York Times Jerusalem bureau chief, Times U.N. bureau chief, Times foreign editor, Times national editor, Times Washington editor, Wall Street Journal diplomatic correspondent, Reuters diplomatic correspondent, Money Magazine Washington bureau chief, U.S. News and World Report Latin America bureau chief.



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correspondent, Money Magazine Washington bureau chief, U.S. News and World Report Latin America bureau chief.

He or she would have had experience as a foreign correspondent in Russia, Tokyo, Mexico, London, Asia, the Middle East and Western Europe.

He or she would have written 14 books. And he or she would have won the 1964 third-grade spelling bee at P.S. 183 in Manhattan, on the word "necessary."

### "Monolithically Prejudicial"?

*Q. Could you give me a remotely reasonable explanation as to why The New York Times relentlessly treats citizens who are anti-Obama, anti-abortion, pro-marriage, pro-gun ownership, pro-tobacco rights, and proponents of individual liberty with such extreme bias, humiliation, and — worst of all — silence? As much as I love newspapers, it's people like you and The New York Times who make others smile to see your industry go down in flames. The Times is so monolithically prejudicial to an extreme degree in each of these areas — both on the editorial page and on the front page, that any claims to integrity, or indeed conscience, are nonexistent.*

*And who exactly does Paul Krugman think he is by being ultra-condescending toward Americans who are fighting for their beliefs and way of life with regard to the anti-tax movement? Krugman's recent comments about such were, in a word, disgusting. Regardless of one's viewpoint, these protests would make our forefathers proud that there are still people willing to stand up for their beliefs.*

**A.** Is there a possible answer to this question?

First, there is no "monolithically prejudiced" New York Times. The editorial page has nothing to do with what goes on the front page, and vice versa.

Let me attempt to address a few of your points. First, we do not treat people who are, as you say, "anti-Obama, anti-abortion," with bias or silence. We talk about these issues all the time. If by bias, do you mean we take positions? Of course we do. We produce an editorial page.

Do we disagree with those who would criminalize abortion (which I presume is what you mean by "anti-abortion")? Yes, vociferously. But then again, so does most of the country. Criminalizing abortion is a fringe position in the United States.

As for the rest, we are pro-marriage. In fact, many of us are married. We are in favor of gun ownership, so long as the owners register their firearms and are not children, violent offenders or criminally insane.

We are neither for nor against "tobacco rights," but we believe, as does the entire medical profession, that smoking is dangerous to your health. We also believe that cities and states and the federal government have the right to restrict tobacco use in public places.

We are ardent defenders of individual liberties. It is the subject of hundreds of editorials.

Paul Krugman fights for his beliefs and stands up for them in every column.

### Too Easy on Obama?

**Q.** *Why does The Times seem so biased?*

*I like to believe that I am a moderate and do not have an agenda towards either of the recent White House administrations. I am no fan of our last President and I gave him a failing grade for the job he did. At the same*



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either of the recent White House administrations. I am no fan of our last President and I gave him a failing grade for the job he did. At the same time, I am very skeptical of our current President as he has very little track record.

With the amount of serious changes that President Obama is trying to enact so quickly, I am shocked at the lack of questions coming from our free press. I am not trying to derail anything he is trying to accomplish; I am just looking for information sources that will help me look at his choices from all sides. There are positives and negatives with each policy and The New York Times appears to be applauding almost every policy he enacts without so much as one legitimate question to its long-term impact.

Additionally, there has been little to no criticism of him personally. The last President underwent extremely harsh criticisms from The New York Times in his first few months and throughout his term. I believe these were justified. Let's just see some of the same fairness for the new guy.

Without an honest and balanced free press, where will our society be in 20 years from now?

A. If you are referring to the editorial and Op-Ed pages in your question, I would submit respectfully that we have published many, many articles in the last three months that question President Obama's policies and priorities on a wide range of issues. Are we finding ourselves more in agreement with this president than the last one? Absolutely.

### Physical Abuse of Women

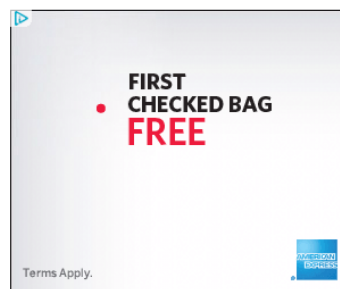
Q. Yesterday's lead editorial on the woes of Afghani and Pakistani women was truly touching. Where is your concern expressed for, and why have you failed to mention, the plight of Saudi women — including the plight of the 75-year-old who was sentenced to 75 lashes, four months in prison and exile for receiving five loaves of bread delivered to her home by her 24-year-old nephew and his business partner, reported in your newspaper recently?

A. We have written many editorials on the plight of women in Saudi Arabia, most recently [this one](#).

### Are Op-Ed Articles Ever Assigned?

Q. Does the Op-Ed page solicit pieces? On Feb. 12th of this year, the bicentennial of the birth of Charles Darwin, you ran an op-ed piece by Olivia Judson. Ms. Judson had been writing a column for nytimes.com on evolutionary biology for the previous year. The impression I came away with was that the many writers who no doubt submitted pieces about Darwin for that occasion never stood a chance of getting published — that "slot" had already been assigned to Ms. Judson. (Full disclosure; I did not submit such a piece!)

A. Yes, the Op-Ed page solicits articles every day. Most of the articles we publish were, in fact, solicited. This does not mean that we ignore the unsolicited manuscripts we receive. Actually, we read each and every one of them, and we publish quite a few.



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### TRENDING

1. Trump, Saying 'Racism Is Evil,' Condemns Violence in Charlottesville
2. Game of Thrones: 'Game of Thrones' Season 7, Episode 5: 'Eastwatch' Brings Big Reveals and New Schemes
3. Op-Ed Columnist: When the President Is Un-



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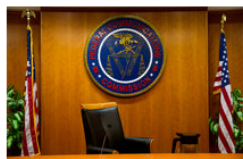
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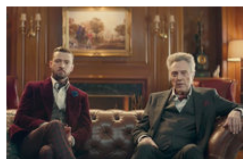
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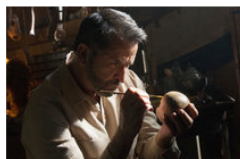
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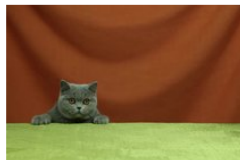
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